

The First Performance of "The Barber of Seville."

A "Life of Rossini," by H. Sutherland Edwards, recently published, gives the following account of the first performance of *The Barber of Seville*:

Madame Giorgi Righetti was the "Rosina" of the evening. Garcia, the celebrated tenor, was the "Almaviva." The "Figaro" was our friend the chief lodger, Luigi Zamboni, who, after distinguishing himself on all the operatic stages in Europe, became, like Garcia, a singing master, and taught other "Figaros," beside "Almavivas" and "Rossinis," how to sing Rossini's music. The original "Don Basilio" was Vitarelli; "Bartholo," Botticelli. The overture, an original work, written expressly for *Il Barbiere*, and not the overture to *Aureliano in Palmira*, afterwards substituted for it, was executed in the midst of a general murmuring. "Such," remarks Zanini, "as is heard on the approach of a procession." Stendhal says that the Roman public recognized, or thought they recognized, in the overture the grumbling of an old guardian, and the lively remonstrances of his interesting ward. But he also says that the overture performed was that of *Aureliano*; probably he confounds two different representations. M. Azevedo thinks the original overture was lost through the carelessness of a copyist, but it is difficult to understand how not only the composer's score, but also the orchestral parts, could have been lost in this manner.

One thing is certain, that on the opening night the overture met with little attention. The introduction, according to Stendhal, was not liked; but this can only mean that it was not heard. The appearance of Garcia did not change the disposition of the public. "The composer," says Madame Giorgi Righetti, "was weak enough to allow Garcia to sing beneath 'Rossini's' balcony a Spanish melody of his own arrangement." Garcia maintained that as the scene was in Spain, the Spanish melody would give the drama an appropriate local color, but unfortunately the artist who reasoned so well, and who was such an excellent singer, forgot to tune his guitar before appearing on the stage as "Almaviva." He began the operation in the presence of the public; a string broke; the vocalist proceeded to replace it, but before he could do so laughter and hisses were heard from all parts of the house. The Spanish air, when Garcia was at last ready to sing it, did not please the Italian audience, and the pit listened to it just enough to be able to give an ironical imitation of it afterwards.

The audience could not miss the introduction of "Figaro's" air, but when Zamboni entered, with another guitar in his hand, a loud laugh was set up, and not a phrase of "Largo al factotum" was heard. When "Rosina" made her appearance in the balcony, the public were quite prepared to applaud Madame Giorgi Righetti in an air which they thought they had a right to expect from her; but only hearing her utter a phrase which led to nothing, the expressions of disapprobation recommenced. The duet between "Almaviva" and "Figaro" was accompanied throughout with hissing and shouting. The fate of the work seemed now decided.

At length "Rosina" reappeared, and sang the cavatina which has so long been desired; for Madame Giorgi Righetti was young, had a fresh, beautiful voice, and was a great favorite with the Roman public. Three long rounds of applause followed the conclusion of her air, and gave some hope that the opera might yet be saved. Rossini, who was at the orchestral piano, bowed to the public, then turned toward the singer, and whispered, "Oh, natura!"

The entry of "Don Basilio," now so effective, was worse than the first night. Rossini, who was at the piano, bowed to the public, then turned toward the singer, and whispered, "Oh, natura!"

At the beginning of the magnificent finale, a cat appeared on the stage, and with the usual effect. "Figaro" drove it one way, "Bartholo" another, and in avoiding "Basilio" it encountered the skirt of "Rosina"—behaved, in short, as a cat will be sure to behave mixed up in the action of a grand operatic finale. The public were only too glad to have an opportunity of amusing themselves apart from the comedy; and the opening of the finale was not listened to at all.

The noise went on increasing until the curtain fell. Then Rossini turned towards the public, shrugged his shoulders, and began to applaud. The audience were deeply offended by this openly-expressed contempt for their opinion, but they made no reply at the time.

The vengeance was reserved for the second act, of which not a note passed the orchestra. The hubbub was so great that nothing like it was ever heard at any theatre. Rossini, in the meanwhile, remained perfectly calm, and afterwards went home as composed as if the work, received in such an insulting manner, had been the production of some other musician. After changing their clothes, Madame Giorgi Righetti, Garcia, Zamboni, and Botticelli went to his house to console him in his misfortune. They found him fast asleep.

The next day he wrote the delightful cavatina, *Ecco ridente il cielo*, to replace Garcia's unfortunate Spanish air. The melody of the new solo was borrowed from the opening chorus of *Aureliano in Palmira*, written by Rossini, in 1814, for Milan, and produced without success; the said chorus having its figure before in the same composer's *Ciro in Babylonia*, also unfavorably received. Garcia read his cavatina as it was written, and sang it the same evening. Rossini, having thought the only consolation to be had, and pretended to be ill, that he might not have to take his place in the evening at the piano. The charming melody which, in *Il Barbiere*, is sung by Count Almaviva in honor of Rosina, is addressed by the chorus in *Aureliano* to the spouse of the grand Oisiris, *Sposa del Grande Osiride*, etc.

At the second performance the Romans seemed disposed to listen to the work, of which they really had heard nothing the night before. This was all that was needed to insure the opera's triumph; and, although many of the places were applauded, but still no enthusiasm was exhibited. The music, however, pleased more and more with each succeeding representation, until at last the climax was reached, and *Il Barbiere* produced those transports of admiration which

Romans with which it was afterwards received in every town in Italy, and in due time throughout Europe. It must be added that a great many connoisseurs at Rome were struck from the first moment with the innumerable beauties of Rossini's score, and went to his house to congratulate him on his excellence. As for Rossini, he was not at all surprised at the change which took place in public opinion. He was as certain of the success of his work the first night, when he was being hoisted, as he was a week afterwards, when every one applauded it to the skies.

THE COMING JOKER.

A Successor to George D. Prentice—Cool Even for the Season.

A man has applied for the vacancy on the *Louisville Journal* caused by the death of Mr. Prentice. The *Journal* publishes his letter, but gives no name. It is a remarkable specimen of cool assumption. The writer says: "I know very well that his place is not to be filled, yet I write you to ask the privilege of attempting to continue a part of his work—I allude to the spice, humor, geniality, and wit which he gave to the columns of the *Journal*." Then, after reciting his claims, and showing what he has done, the writer incloses several pages of specimens of his work, remarking that they are in a "little different vein" from that of Mr. Prentice. He also says he does not want steady employment in the office, but the lodgings of a daily office kills every inspiration, and stops every thought. "What his 'inspiration' is may be seen by the following extracts from his specimens:—

"I am times say such a good thing I am afraid I am just remembering of it."
"It is a good cline in a man, when he remembers the Sabbath day, to keep it wholly."
"There is a drop that never phases—Fleece, Flyce, Wild Oats, and Babios."
"I have often regretted that a man wasn't always born with a small label on his back telling what he was good for. As it is a man don't generally find out till so late in the season he's good for nuthin'."

You can't make clever out of pewter, by skowling at it nor platin it, tho' it's often tride." Think of this in a "successor" to George D. Prentice!

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